

SUPERVISORY AND FOOD SAFETY TRAINING FOR INDUSTRY
LEADER

ABOUT TROPICAL CHEESE INDUSTRIES INC. Tropical Cheese began as the dream of Rafael Mendez. Born in Las Villas, Cuba, Mr. Mendez came to the US at 17 with \$50 and a dream. Armed with experience from working in his father's cafeteria, he gravitated to the food industry, first making deliveries, then establishing a small milk route. Finally, he opened Tropical Cheese in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Thirty-plus years later, the family-owned business has 250 employees and remains the favorite cheese producer of many Hispanic households. Tropical Cheese uses the finest natural ingredients and employs award-winning cheesemakers from around the world.

THE CHALLENGE. As part of Tropical Cheese's continuous improvement plan, the company brought in its trusted process improvement partner, the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program (NJMEP), part of the MEP National Network, for assistance in implementing FDA requirements. The FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), signed into law in January 2011, is the most sweeping reform of food safety laws in more than 70 years. The law shifts the focus from responding to contamination to preventing it, and food manufacturers have been working diligently to ensure they are in compliance with the new regulations.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. NJMEP began the process by conducting an assessment of Tropical Cheese. The assessment identified the lack of communication between departments, and NJMEP recommended that Tropical Cheese participate in a Supervisory Skills training in conjunction with the FSMA-related training to address those issues. Tropical Cheese and NJMEP worked closely to create a training plan that would not interfere with the company's demanding production requirements. NJMEP and its resource, Juan Ortiz, built and conducted a Supervisory Skills training program that covered Basics of Management, Leadership Skills and Managing Change & Performance.

Next, NJMEP brought together companies for an Industry Specific Consortium Grant, and Tropical Cheese participated in an FSMA training with 18 other NJ Food Manufacturers. Consortium grants make it possible for companies that would not be able to meet direct grant requirements, for example 10 participants in a class, to benefit from the DOL programs. In addition to saving money, Tropical Cheese retained and increased sales by improving its manufacturing processes and upholding safety standards. Four Tropical Cheese employees attended classes in Food Allergens, Internal Auditing and Corrective Action, and Root Cause Analysis and SQF Practitioner training, gaining the skills they needed to help the company meet FSMA regulations.

"We have been working with NJMEP for many years now. They are well-known in the manufacturing industry and possess the experience and outside perspective to assist with any business needs we might have."

-Joseph Vicini, VP of Manufacturing

RESULTS



\$58,000 in new sales



Retained sales of \$19M



Cost savings of \$24,000

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NJMEP